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Court backs ban on Gypsy fair

The high court yesterday refused to overturn an order banning a horse fair which was set to attract thousands of Gypsies to a Kent village this weekend.

The Gypsy Council and Eli Frankham, who — like his forefathers — has been going to the fair at Horsmonden all his life, had claimed that the decision to stop the event, which takes place on the village green every second Sunday of September, was an “unnecessary overreaction”.

Their counsel, Jan Luba QC, told deputy judge David Pannick in London that to the Romany community the fair was “an essential part of their remaining limited calendar of social and cultural events and its existence is integral to their traditional way of life”.

But the judge, who had to give his ruling before 6pm when the order banning the fair under the 1986 Public Order Act was due to start, said Tunbridge Wells borough council and the home secretary had acted lawfully. The order lasts until Monday morning.

He said it was surprising that the Romany community had not made its challenge in April when the local parish council decided to cancel the fair — the first step in the process.

The parish council said the fair had outgrown the village, giving rise to disorder